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If God be for us





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**If God be for Us**

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IF GOD BE FOR US



BY THE REVEREND

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To  
MY SISTER AGNES  
MRS. CARROLL NEIDE BROWN

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## Chapter I

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“What shall we say to these things ? If God be for us, who is against us?”

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## Chapter I

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THE task which I propose to myself in this and a few subsequent studies is to make clear to my own mind, and to enter with sympathy and understanding, the world of ideas, of beliefs, of fears, of protests, which lies behind that passionate and militant passage at the close of our eighth chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Romans.

It is one of those great passages—the fortieth chapter of Isaiah is another—which, by virtue of their spaciousness and exaltation, their simplicity and their ultimateness, rise like peaks out of a tumult of mountains—final ventures of the human spirit into the region of absolute truth. They are truly eloquent words, entirely free, indeed, from the affectation and self-consciousness of the lower eloquence. They stagger with the

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burden of reality, yet glow and leap with a passion which I do not know how to define except to say that it rests upon a kind of terror if it should all prove untrue.

I think *that* is a note of all really moving speech. We feel as we listen that the whole of our life is being concentrated into one hope, one interest, one point of view. One thing after another we leave behind. One thing after another, in the triumph of our spirits, we feel that we can dispense with and even despise. Thus we rise and rise into an intense solitude, above thought, though still thinking, knowing only that it is well with our soul, that this is life and truth and reality : and what makes the poignancy of the experience is that now we have gone so far that we cannot come back. We must find some resting-place, some justification for our journey. We are like swimmers who have gone too far into the depths to return, who must go on now towards the other shore : or

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like the dove from Noah's ark, which must find a place to rest itself out of the vortex of the dark floods. And blessed indeed are they whose lonely minds, voyaging through the Infinite, find, like that dove, a leaf—some token of God from that world of realities—which they may bear back with them into the world of their daily experience.

As we yield ourselves up to the passion of such words and ideas as are in this eighth chapter of Romans, we arrive at some such promontory in the Spirit-world. We feel that this is truth, or there is no such thing as truth for man.

Now, it might be said that such a passage as this with which the eighth chapter of Romans concludes, simply because it is so eloquent and rhetorical, is unsuitable for purposes of exposition : that we must not apply to the interpretation of words a spirit different from that in which they were conceived : that to apply the critical reason to words which evidently broke from St. Paul's

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soul in a torrent is as incongruous as it would be to measure light with a foot-rule, or to interrupt the influence of music by speaking in an arid way of the mechanics of sound. It takes a poet to estimate poetry : and when we do estimate poetry, it is by virtue of the poet who still survives within each one of us.

The objection is a sound one, and ought to be attended to by many. But it does not apply to the intention which is in my own mind. It is perfectly true that an outpouring like this, which begins with “Who shall separate us ?”—an outpouring which is, by every token, spontaneous and passionate, is not to be subjected to any cold or formal inquiry. I do not propose to consider the passage coldly, and as a thing which may or may not be true. I wish, not to consider the words at all, but rather to feel their rush and volume, to rebuke myself all the time that there is so little in my own life comparable to this passion and confidence : to envy this man, the depths of

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whose life rested so securely upon God. I wish rather to feel the greatness of his soul.

It is quite true also that in the case of some kinds of so-called eloquence a writer or speaker, far from giving any indication of his true personality, disguises and conceals himself. Words and gestures may be assumed for the occasion, and with a view to effect. In this they may even succeed, but it is a poor success. The speaker or writer has approved himself as a good tradesman in his particular craft, but he has not unveiled the face of truth.

In a moment of true eloquence, on the other hand, a writer or a speaker permits those who have ears to hear to detect the very stuff and substance of his soul. As you listen, there may be a thousand things which still are unknown to you concerning this one who is swaying your spirit. But what he is essentially, you do know. What this life means to him, you do know. How, in the last solitude

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of his personal life, his spirit behaves and tends, you do know. For in a moment of great and moving speech a man's ultimate nature is disclosed. All his knowledge, all his experience, is caught up in a flame and melted, and if it must pour out, it will pour out by the way of the man's dearest and final concern.

There is no hour or moment when we are so true to ourselves, and when we give so much of ourselves to the world, as that hour or moment when some sentiment which has been smouldering for years or for days beneath the surface of our life, having been brooded upon anew, at length tears open a way of utterance. In such a moment we give ourselves away. We no longer live, but the truth, as we perceive it, lives in us. What happens when we are moved by great speech is not that we are listening as to one who plays skilfully upon a harp : no ; what happens is that we are seeing, though in a glass darkly, some aspect of the Face of God !

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To those who understand these things, to approach a passage like this, in which the final things in a man's soul betray themselves, will be felt to be one of those tasks which require from us a reverent and susceptible spirit.

To see the soul in any moment of reality, to look upon the soul engaged in a struggle with some elementary thing, like misfortune, or moral fear, or death—is to occupy for the moment ground whereon a man should take off his shoes, for it is holy. At such a moment, when we see the human spirit in its nakedness, we are approaching as near as it is possible for us, to the holy of holies where God is.

To put the matter in another light, I should like in these studies to ask ourselves : What is it that lies behind this glowing passage ? What ideas ? What view of the world is the Apostle contending for ? What view of the world is he contending against ? St. Paul claimed that in preaching he did not simply beat

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the air—meaning, I suppose, that he did not deal with abstractions and unrealities, that in his preaching he was moving amongst the actual and pressing concerns of man. We may well believe that he was no less real and definite and concrete in an epistle, and in such a considered and careful epistle as this to the Romans. Besides, it was not about nothing, nor was it about things indifferent, that a mind like St. Paul's would take fire, as it does here. I spoke of this great passage as a glowing one: and that indeed describes it. For a glow is produced, not when you bring a light to some flimsy material—then you have simply a flame, and next moment blackness, the surrounding atmosphere in no wise warmed, and your own spirit somewhat depressed by the momentary illusion. A glow such as you have in this great passage comes when the element of fire has encountered an obstinate hostility, when for a time the two struggle—the material mass and the challenging

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heat, the one putting forth all its energy and summoning all its reserves in order to destroy the other : the fire steadily winning the day, first with the evidence of smoke, then with the outburst of little flames, then with the final triumph when the very material which at first resisted can resist no more, and yields itself up handsomely, contributing to the warmth and brilliance and comfort.

So here : they are no indifferent matters that St. Paul is contending against, in these determined and passionate words. Death, life, angels, principalities, things present, things to come, powers, height, depth—we feel from the very strength and desperateness of his protest that in each word he is grappling with some powerful enemy and contradiction of his faith in Christ.

Let that metaphor from the nature of a glowing fire, viz. that the burning and glow arise from the conflict of flame and opposing things—let that metaphor decide our way of approach. Let us ask :

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What lies behind St. Paul and on his side, and what lies behind those opposing things, in this precise clash and conflict of ideas and powers and points of view ?

St. Paul himself, and on such a matter he alone is qualified to give evidence, has told us that one day something happened to him which made an entire break in his life. Jesus Christ appeared to him outside the gate of Damascus. The whole of the Apostle's subsequent life took its direction from that experience. It simply meant everything to him. Instead of the influence of it wearing off, as happens in the case of many an exalted mood, it went on deepening and broadening until he could say—and he did not need to say it to convince us : for we can see that it was so—"that he no longer lived, but Christ lived in him." From that day he believed in Jesus Christ as the Lord from heaven, and loved Him, and lived to bring others into the blessedness of his own condition—with a fidelity and passion and patience which fills us all

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with wonder and shame. He affects us as never having thought about anything else but Christ all the days of his life. He became—what we might call him, and what he on one occasion comes near to calling himself—an abandoned servant of Christ.

There are passages in which he sets aside his habitual reticence and allows us to see for a moment what the manner of his life was. “Are they ministers of Christ ? (I speak as one beside myself) I more ; in labours more abundantly, in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep ; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren ; in

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labour and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” And so on, until in our secret hearts we cry, “Lord, have mercy upon us.”

Nor did he find it a hard and sad thing to live on this plane of unrelieved consecration. He had his own dark hours. But he never once looked back. He envied no one. Great as were his sufferings, they were always less than his joy. All this had its source and fountain in that experience outside Damascus when he saw a light from heaven and heard the voice of Jesus calling him by name.

We know how any deep experience affects our view of God and the world. It will depend upon many things whether our experience at the hands of life will affect us very seriously and whether it will affect us for long. Our Lord prepared us for finding people whose natures were of such a kind that good impressions, the vision of God even, would soon pass away, losing themselves in the

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general interest of the world or in any later excitement. But He assured us at the same time that there were natures of a nobler order, natures which would receive the vision of God with their whole heart and mind, and within these it would germinate, living on the very substance of such souls and transmuting them to its own spirit. Saul of Tarsus was a man of this order, his life being witness.

But, to dwell upon this point for a moment, any deep experience at the hands of life has the effect of casting over the whole world for us its own light or its own gloom. We cannot but see all things from the standpoint of that experience. Love comes to us, and as we open the door it is not love only that we see: we see a love-lit world, a world which dwells in God, "with the sunshine and the swallows and the flowers." And though to those who love, severe days will come, and even because of their love severe days are sure to come, they will

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be churlish hearts indeed who, when the clouds assemble, begin to speak foolishly concerning God, as though clouds were the abiding element, forgetting the day when the sky was blue for them.

But it is not love only which, coming to a human heart, has the power to make new heavens and a new earth. Any great emotion which is fortunate enough to take hold of us, when for certain reasons we are ready to enter a new allegiance, may have the same great power.

We may one day see the pinched face of a hungry child—and that may be for us the call of God summoning us to a crusade. Or we may read a book where some social shame is stripped of its disguise, and by the power of art heightened in its cruelty and pervasiveness; and that reading may under God save our own soul as by fire, and rally us to the depth of our being, to the side of purity against the squalor of the world. It is what we *see*, in some hour of personal

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tension, which decides what we shall see for many a day : and there are visions of such a kind that never afterwards can a man look out upon life except from their standpoint. Saul of Tarsus saw Jesus Christ risen from the dead. That gave him his world. He saw :

that Face  
“ Which far from vanish rather grows,  
And decomposes but to recompose,  
Becomes my universe and feels and knows.”

Now, the vision of God in Christ when it comes to a man does not come, so to speak, into an empty room, nor do its operations and effects occur in a swept and empty place. It is to a *man* that the vision comes : to a wonderful nexus of ancestral inheritances and racial prejudices, to a tumult of impressions, things learned, things seen, things done, and the effects and reactions of all these; to a being with his memories, his hopes, his faith, his fear, and some predominant temperament or bias. And what the vision of God in Christ does is not to

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destroy these ; but to compel them to take their places in a new life-system in which the vision of God in Christ is now supreme.

At the outset it may seem as if the vision of Christ emptied our life of all its former occupants, all our natural tendencies, all the results of our learning, all our earlier experience of the world. At the outset there seems to be nothing but Christ and our own direct response to Him. It is a time of something like the bridal joy or the dawn of love, when we have only each other ; and the world of facts and circumstances has no reality for us. And God permits us such a time. But it is no disparagement of love, and no aspersion on its divine truth and quality, to say that this purely lyrical time passes, and ought to pass. Then come the days when our love is deepened and moralised by duty, by responsibility, by absences that make the heart fonder, by the memory of struggles endured, of difficulties overcome. It may be that

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every high emotion is destined to pass from poetry into prose, from ecstasy to duty, from music to the engaging of an enemy : but there is a noble prose ; there is the prose of a Milton, where you have a soul moving still in an atmosphere of poetry, of lofty ideas and hopes, with a background in God, and contending in this actual world of conflicting things for the embarrassed soul of man.

When Jesus Christ appeared to Saul of Tarsus outside the gate of Damascus, it was to the man Saul that He appeared. It was to a man with Saul's racial and personal qualities. It was to the pupil of Gamaliel. It was to a Pharisee who was the child of Pharisees. It was to an able and serious man. It was to one who by nature, *i.e.* by the calling and election of God, was a religious man : one who demanded of life that it should mean something, and that it should mean something of such a kind that a man is saved or he is lost according as he devotes himself to that something or neglects it.

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And above all, it was to one who had conceived it to be his duty to God to blot out from the mind of mankind the pretensions of Christ, that this very Christ appeared, bearing evidences for Paul no longer to be questioned that He was the Lord from heaven.

We read that the vision felled him to the ground and struck him blind. The voice in which, out of his overthrow, he whispers, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ?" is the voice of one in whom that great thing has happened which must happen and which is of such a kind that until it happens, somehow, we are none of us soft enough and suppliant enough and lonely enough to pass through the narrow gate !

But it is no part of God's design to arrest or annihilate the personality of a man. Personality in its pure idea is the work and emanation of God Himself. We must believe that God called us severally into being because He saw no other way. It had taken all history up

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to that hour to make a Saul of Tarsus possible. It had taken Genesis and Exodus, and the Exile and the Psalms; it had taken the whole episode of Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great ; it had taken the history of Imperial Rome up to the time of Augustus—to make this Saul of Tarsus, with his knowledge of Hebrew and his knowledge of Greek, and his agony concerning God, all fermenting in his blood, and it was no part of God's will that Christ's intervention should annihilate that costly piece of work.

Saul rose from the earth with a terrible silence in his soul : a silence like the silence of an impeded flood just before it finds its way. He arose from the earth and was led by the hand into Damascus. For three days he sat there in silence, in the darkness of total blindness also ; and we read that for those three days he neither ate nor drank. What went on within the soul of Paul during those three days we do not know. But we can imagine. In the light of

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all that he became, we can be almost sure. A man can think a great deal in three days: especially if he be quite alone and if he is suffering—without physical pain.

At the end of three days God sent a good man to open his eyes. In God's view, that is to say, Paul was ready to take the road again. In the book of the Acts we are told that as soon as his eyes were opened, Paul preached in Damascus that Jesus is the Christ. In the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul rather seems to say that as soon as his eyes were opened, he went away into the desert of Arabia. I don't think there is any contradiction: and I have no patience with people who make a great deal about such discrepancies, when what we are dealing with is the agony of a human soul on its way towards God.

What I suppose really happened was that Paul, after his eyes were opened and he was calm enough to speak about himself, confessed at once, there and then in

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Damascus, that Jesus is the Son of God: That he knew. At that stage perhaps it was the one thing he did know: that Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, whom I believe Paul had known in the flesh, whose death it is most probable he had witnessed—that that Jesus was and had all the time been the Son and Gift of God to this world, which in its blindness and in the perverseness of its religious prejudice had nailed Him to a felon's cross. Paul knew that, and there and then he said it. So far that was all he knew. Then, I take it, what happened was that the fight, properly speaking, began within Paul, when, after the onslaught of the Risen Lord, the man within him rallied, and Christ, who was well set in the citadel of his life, issued out to subdue and transform the outlying provinces.

For Paul was one of those who must be unanimous, one of those who cannot endure to live on what I have often called the principle of bulkheads: one compartment of their life devoted to faith,

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another devoted to thought, another to things—with no mutual intercourse or control, each paramount within its own sphere but no one of them supreme. Paul was one of those ultimately sincere men to whom life must be one, since God is One. And so, I take it, Paul asked to be allowed to go away by himself for a time in order to think about things, to bring things together again in some new and organic system. Especially to think how his whole life had broken down under him, and how he must rebuild it—its philosophy, its reading of history, its daily practice—Jesus Christ Himself being chief corner-stone, in whom each several building (or compartment, we might say), fitly framed together, should grow into a living temple in the Lord, for the habitation of God.

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## **Chapter II**

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“But when it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, even from my mother’s womb, and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles; straightway I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before me: but I went away into Arabia.”—*Gal. i. 15–17.*

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## Chapter II

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A GREAT experience condemns a man to the task of reconstructing in his thought and imagination the world in which that experience took place. In a great experience a man has come upon a new order of realities, and he must find room for those realities. Henceforward he must see life and all things under the aspect of that experience which has now become for him the heart of all reality, it may even be, his one indisputable fact. Henceforward all his earlier facts, all his habitual ways of considering life, all the incidents, all the ideas, all the beliefs which went to the making of him, range themselves into two companies or forces. On the one side are gathered those things which seem now to have been leading up to the hour of his great experience, or which seem now to corroborate his

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great experience—these on the one hand ; and on the other the things which seem now, looking back, to have been all along in conflict with that experience, or to be now most manifestly in conflict with it.

Paul's one indisputable fact, the one experience which for its depth and authenticity had for the time reduced all other facts to insignificance, was this : that on the way to Damascus, Jesus of Nazareth, as Lord and Risen from the dead, had appeared to him and summoned him by name. That was the one thing he knew : and henceforth, so long as he maintained his living contact with that experience, all his interests, habits of mind, prejudices, beliefs, hopes, fears—his entire life-system must be co-ordinated and organised round that central point of light.

It was a very deep instinct which led this man, as soon as he had recovered from the bewilderment of this crisis, to go away by himself to think about it and to think about everything. To think

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about it, not with the view of undermining its authority, but with the view of doing it honour and giving it its place at the centre of his life, henceforth to dominate everything.

As our Lord, after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him at the Jordan, hurried away into the desert,—to think about all that was involved : to face in solitude the life which the summons of the Eternal Spirit had imposed, to estimate the cost and to assure Himself of His Resources in God ; so His servant, Paul, went away by himself into a solitude which would permit and encourage this great Experience to unfold all its implications. Three years later, he tells us, he returned and went up to Jerusalem, and conferred with the older Apostles, not as one who was inferior to them in the mystery of Christ, but as one who also had seen Christ face to face in solitude and agony and peace.

And now, let us think, with as much

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simplicity as we may, of the truth about God which this Revelation of Jesus as Lord would bring to Paul—the truth which for ever afterwards formed the basis and motive of his life, the Rock of Confidence against which the waves of a contradicting world dashed and hissed in vain. And such an inquiry is most relevant to any deep study of this great passage in “Romans.” We cannot read that passage or hear it read without feeling that the Apostle is fighting over again an old battle, though now in a more radiant mood, with years of experience of Christ to give power and endurance to his spirit. We feel that once again waves of hostile things, dark, sinister shapes are assailing the last convictions of his soul, and that he is beating them back, not with a weapon hastily forged or chosen in the very moment of fear, but with a weapon, a final attitude of his whole being, prepared long beforehand, and found triumphant in many an unrecorded struggle. He beats back those sinister, insinuating

foes—which later we propose to discover in their more modern guise under such words as “angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, any other creature”—he beats back those sinister, insinuating foes, not by any weapon of ingenuity, but simply by falling back upon one great truth, upon one well-remembered fact and experience; the truth and fact and experience which confronted him on the way to Damascus and which he wrought into the very fibres of his soul during those silent years in Arabia.

As we get older, life, considered ultimately, becomes simpler. If God is, and if God is according to Christ Jesus, then all is well for those whose lives are conducted on the basis and principles of such a faith. If God is the Father of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, then there may be a thousand things still mysterious and beyond our power to comprehend or imagine, but we have at least a way of looking at our life which enables us to

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stand up to the contradictions of experience and to meet the affront of death.

Speaking for myself, I find it more helpful and sustaining to put the ultimate question of our faith thus, and to ask, “Is God indeed the Father of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ?” than to ask, “Is Jesus Christ the Son of God?” The question is the same; but, speaking for myself, I tend more and more to come to God through Christ, than to come to Christ through God. I tend more and more to clothe God with the qualities and attributes of Christ, than to clothe Christ with the qualities and attributes of Deity. And I venture to think that this is nearer to the theological method of the New Testament, and nearer to what is the behaviour and instinct of our soul in prayer and in any time of spiritual distress.

The God in whom we Christians believe is not merely a nexus of categories, such as omnipotence, omniscience, unchangeableness, and the rest. The God in whom

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we Christians believe is the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To use the very language of the New Testament, "we believe in God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Yes, we might go all the length and say we believe in God for the sake of Jesus Christ. We believe that Christ was and is in the bosom of God from all eternity. We believe there is a Cross in the Godhead. For we believe there is a heart in the Godhead, and what is the very function and glory of a heart except that it will break, if need be, in the agony of its love !

What I want to be assured of—and the whole effort of Christ is to assure me—is that the Power which brought all things into being and sustains them—a Power which I do not need to be convinced is Infinite, is a Power which is penetrated by Christ. I want to be assured that Christ is the constitution of the Godhead. For we men and women do live in an isle of terror, surrounded by spaces before the bare idea of which our spirit faints

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and grows cold. We are here for a day and are gone. And soon or late, it all comes to be too strange, too weird, too disheartening : until Something happens either to make it credible to me that Love may be as infinite as Power, and more ancient than Power ; or so to win my heart to a holy life in this world that I shall have no disabling anxiety concerning what may lie beyond.

Now the Presence of Christ in the world is for me that persuading, reassuring thing. I confront the misgivings of my soul with the testimony, the faith, and experience of Jesus. I know, of course, that here there is no logical necessity. Christ cannot coerce me into believing that the Infinite God is His Father, that the Heart which beat in Jesus beats in God. But He asks me to believe this. Life appeals to me to believe this. The signs of love in the world keep calling to me to disregard the contrary signs. And behind everything, at the end of all my thoughts and despairs, I come upon this Jesus who

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lived in this Holy Love, whose Soul dwelt in it, whose Face shone with the light of it, who bore up through life on the hidden wings of it, who leaned back in death into the arms of it—and who appeared to one here and there of those who knew Him, in the unworldly glory of it.

Life, which is the contrivance and hand of the Eternal Spirit, life has its own way of discovering to each of us the nature of reality : life chose its own way of discovering to Paul that the nature of reality is Christ. Like a beacon, that light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ made long inroads and avenues of light backward, forward, upward, downward, and in that light Paul's spirit abode, issuing forth and returning again until his day was done.

Now, the thing which the revelation of Jesus as Lord meant above everything else to Paul was—to put it in a phrase from this passage—that God is for us. In a sense, of course, as a devout Jew he had always believed that God stood in a

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definite relation to men. In a sense, too, as later on he saw, the prophets and psalmists had conceived of God in warmer and more loving terms than had been permitted by the Rabbinical schools of his own time and of immediately preceding times.

But it was to Paul, a Pharisee of that day, that the Risen Christ appeared.

God had been to him as a taskmaster overshadowing his private life, coming upon him suddenly in moments of unworthiness. The most that even a good man might do with regard to God was to maintain a sleepless vigilance over his own behaviour, occupying himself with appointed ceremonial acts and observances. And when he had done all this, a man had the miserable feeling that still he had fallen short. He was always, as it were, on his trial before God, and in that trial always stood condemned.

But the Revelation of the Risen Lord had changed all that ; and it is the greatness of Paul that he grasped what was

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involved in this change to such a depth, and with such clearness of vision and such hardihood of doctrine and practice as under God to have effected the religious life and the religious philosophy for ever.

Paul saw God in Christ—not imputing unto men their trespasses. Henceforward, Paul began with God. He saw God freely giving His Son to the world, not asking first whether the world was fit to receive Him. Indeed, he saw, and this was the amazing thing, which, as he pondered it, brought on the revolution in his faith,—he saw that God sent His Son into the world not because the world was worthy of Him, but because it was not worthy of Him. “God commendeth His love to us”—so he once expressed himself—“in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

God was not to be conceived, therefore, as a Power seated upon a throne waiting for something to happen: He was a loving Spirit, urging Himself into the hearts of men.

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What, then, is required of us men is not that we shall work ourselves up to something, but simply that we shall open our hearts to One who is there. Goodness, then, is not mere correctness : it is communion,—communion with God, the passing into our lives of the supernatural life of Jesus.

It was Paul's ignorance of this and his neglect of it that had led to all his religious misery. He had been like a man climbing a mountain, avoiding chasms and shuddering under beetling masses of rock, in order to reach God at the top. Now he could begin with God at the bottom. He saw clearly now that sin was simply the absence of the Holy Spirit, and the misery of sin simply the absence of faith in that full forgiveness which Jesus declared and which Jesus had bequeathed.

From time to time it has been alleged, and attempts have been made to prove it, that Paul practically introduced a new faith ; that he was the founder of a new

religion, which in its characteristic words and ideas is different from the religion of Jesus. And so we have had the cry “back to Christ,” with the insinuation that in our devotion to the Pauline interpretation of Christ we had departed from the pure witness to God of Christ Himself. Words from the Sermon on the Mount are quoted, and these are contrasted in their simplicity and directness with the strained and controversial language, say, of this Epistle to the Romans.

But the more deeply the Gospels and the Epistles are studied, the more deeply we breathe the spirit of the one and of the other,—and this we will do, not in our days of easy and complacent curiosity, but in our hours of misgiving and of necessity and of unworldliness,—the more reason shall we have to confess that the Jesus of History whose mind we have in the Gospels has simply become the Christ of Experience in the writings of St. Paul.

It is true, of course, that Paul is a man,

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and a man of very unusual moral and intellectual dimensions. And it is no part of Christ's proper influence upon His disciples to paralyse their own individual life, making them impersonal echoes of Himself. Christ works in men as He promised He would in the world—first the seed, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. The ear is not the seed and is not at all like the seed, but it sprang from the seed by an invincible process. A disciple is faithful to his master, not by repeating in later circumstances words which the master uttered in his day. A disciple proves that he is faithful by embodying in his words and in the impression which he makes upon his time the kind of atmosphere and influence and spiritual direction which his master created in his day.

And what people should ask, who are in any honest doubt as to the relation between Jesus and Paul, is whether there is not in the whole impression and testimony of Paul a background of ideas concerning

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God and man and life and duty such as were strange and indeed abhorrent to him until Christ encountered him and first compelled and then convinced him to accept them as the truth.

It is not at all to be wondered at that St. Paul should say things that were entirely his own. He had a story to tell, his own story, the story of how Christ,—and all that Christ meant as to God and men and everything,—how Christ had come into his life. It is not to be wondered at that he has much to say of the struggle and the process, of the inertia of his own nature which opposed the great change, of the hostility of his own prejudices. It is not to be wondered at that, in his great desire that others, especially men of his own race and of his own traditions, having his own difficulties and repugnances, should not allow those traditions and difficulties and repugnances to close their hearts to this Christ who had made new heavens and a new earth for him—it is not to be wondered at that for the sake

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of these he reasoned and argued and interpreted. He himself tells us that to the Jews he became a Jew, that is to say, he put himself once again at the standpoint of a Jew, and summoned back to his own imagination all the possible and conceivable obstacles to the acceptance of Christ which could occur to a Jew,—and why? —“if, by any means, they also might be saved !”

But pierce through that language of controversy and appeal, and what have you? What is the conception of God which lies behind? Is it not that God is the Spirit of forgiving Love, the Father in heaven whose Redeeming Passion in Jesus endured the Cross, who gave Himself to an undiscerning world? Is not the great Faith behind the entire Pauline literature simply this,—that God is for us? But that was the Faith and testimony of Jesus, which He sealed by His patience on Calvary.

It was God’s acceptance of Christ, it was the ratification by God of Christ’s

whole enterprise on behalf of man—and this the appearance of the Risen Lord attested for Paul—it was this, that is to say, it was Christ, who gave Paul the God whom he preached.

God is altogether on our side. And if this be so, what hostility from the side of the world, or from the region of our own thoughts and memories and fears, is worthy to be compared with this final and blessed resource ? True, we may be called upon to suffer. We see not all things put under Him ; but we see Christ. It is true that the world will organise itself against us. Without may be fightings, within may be fears. Persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword—that may be our portion. (Nay, it had been their portion.) The words of the Psalmist may be the only words that suit our case : “ For Thy sake we are killed all the day long ; the world regards us as sheep meant for slaughter.” But there is always something that can come nearer to us than all these threatenings : “ Oh, the deep, deep

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love of Jesus!" "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Surely, "no conceivable power of life or of death, or of the angelic hierarchy, nothing in present circumstances or future destiny, no possible force; neither the highest height of heaven nor the deepest depth of hell, *no possible creation of God other than what we now know to exist*, shall be able to tear us from that which holds us in a grasp strong as the oath of God—His love to us in Christ Jesus our Lord."

"We are not to build the edifice of a life which at the top is to be within sight of God. We are to start from God, Who from eternity and all along has been beforehand with us: in His external, personal love predestinating, creating, calling, pardoning, holding, and keeping us in continual growth for eternal glory. And the one power of religion is, therefore, faith,—that faculty by which we look continually out of ourselves, and, starting from God, committing ourselves wholly

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to God, raise the fabric of life, in the community of a true human brotherhood, upon the secure basis of the love of Him who created us and will satisfy utterly the being which He has given us."

Human speech can go no farther than that.



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## **Chapter III**

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**“ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ? ”**

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## Chapter III

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THE greater portion of the New Testament was written with the purpose of encouraging those who had become Christians to remain Christians in a world which was steadily becoming more hostile, in a world also which was betraying itself more and more clearly as being opposed to the way of Christ in its very principles. We cannot summarise all the various warnings, encouragements, methods of the spiritual life which the New Testament contains, we cannot summarise these more fairly than to say that the New Testament assures good people who are beset by life, beset by a world-system which is either cruel and persecuting, or immoral and seductive, that the only safe way, the only happy way of serving Christ is the deep and unreserved way. The question which their leaders and teachers

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in the Christian life soon learned to concentrate upon was simply this :

Are you satisfied with Christ ? Is He enough for you ? Are you ready to go on in His promises, and with the resources which He in the secret place of your spirit provides for you day by day ?

At a very early time all hope passed out of the Church that Christians would ever be able to be at home in this world. At a very early time they began to look upon themselves as “pilgrims and strangers” in the earth. And the dangers which beset them were felt by the wiser and more sensitive spirits among them to be the same dangers as beset pilgrims always, viz. that they might tire by the way, that the scenes through which they were passing might corrupt them, that the greater obstacles might depress their energy, or that the smaller obstacles might wear down the fine edge of their intention, or that the mere length and monotony of the journey might arouse the spirit of questioning within them, and

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might even raise in their souls the last, the only question—that question which is of such a kind that the soul which has once even felt its force can never be the same again—the question as to the worth of all high contendings in a world like this, which is girt about with death and silence.

I seem to see the whole effort of the New Testament, and the effort became more insistent as the years passed, and the light of the first great day of the Lord went down—I seem to see the whole effort of the New Testament to be to rally and reinforce the souls of the faithful. The evils of the world are not made light of, the things which are against faith are not passed over in silence or alluded to with mere defiance. No : but good souls who have begun to face life in the power and love of Christ are urged to make no end of trial of the treasures of compensation and reinforcement and private blessedness which are to be found in Him whom they have chosen. They have meat to eat

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that the world knows not of ; and the acutest suffering, if wisely endured, may only yield some new delicacy of the love of Christ. Let them, as Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* was advised, when he entered upon a way where the lions roared—let them keep well in the middle of the path, and though the very breath of lions may threaten them, they will pass through unscathed to the City of God.

It is a great part of the teaching of the New Testament—and through the New Testament it has found its way into every serious treatment of this life of ours, so that to-day it mingles in our atmosphere for the support of many who may not pause to thank God for it—that we may overcome the evils of existence by returning more deeply into the life of our own spirits, that we may gain the victory over things by the way of some deeper and holier understanding of ourselves ; that, in the language of pure Christian experience, we may “more than conquer

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through Jesus Christ our Lord." "We may be pressed on every side, yet not straitened; we may be perplexed, yet not unto despair; we may be pursued, yet not forsaken; we may be smitten down, yet not destroyed, always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body."

And there, perhaps, we are at the very point of view and of feeling for entering definitely into this great passage. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" It is the invincible communion of Christ with the soul which is the basis of all that follows. The hard things of life are not denied. The possibility of weird and uncanny things is not denied. It is even admitted that there may be about us legions of spiritual powers, subtle, pervasive, diabolical, organised by some archfiend. It is confessed that we live our lives in a little world in the midst of appalling spaces, such as would make us feel abject and contemptible in our own

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eyes if we did not believe, as Christ asks us to believe, that human life means something to God.

The natural terror and riskiness of our position is in no wise softened ; nor is the attempt made, as has always been common in the mere rhetoric of the will, from Marcus Aurelius to Emerson and the moderns, to disregard and defy our elementary and abysmal circumstances. No ; what St. Paul says and promises and offers as the basis for an unaffrighted and aspiring human life is that nothing—no cruelty at the hands of man, no hot breath from Nature's possible malignancy, no chill breath from her vastness and unconcern, can separate us from, or can, by virtue of its superior power, come between us and the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There, one's mind comes to a place of cross-roads, where various highways invite one to proceed. For example, this : that Christianity is not in the first instance a philosophy of things as they are,

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still less is Christianity a defence of things as they are.

I do not know how it has come to pass that the defence of this world as it is to-day should somehow or other have been foisted upon the Christian Church. Those who are opposed to our faith or to any faith thrust the dreadful facts of life before our eyes and ask us with various tones of anger and contempt and sorrow to explain how and why this and that came into being in a world which God controls. But when did the Church of Christ ever declare that things as they are, are all right ? When was the Church so satisfied with things as they are that she should be held as bound to defend the natural order as the very mind of God ? The Church has never once declared that things were all right, or even that they were pretty well. In her great days—and, like every institution whose instruments are human, the Church has had her good days and her bad days—the Church in her great days has rather

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declared that things were all wrong, all bad, all rooted in principles which were the negation of God. Of course I know, when I give my mind to the matter, how it has come about that we who believe in God according to the Gospel of Christ, have had thrust upon us the responsibility of giving an interpretation of the world in terms of God as against the interpretation of the world in other terms.

It is not our message, and it never was, that "all's right with the world," in the sense that things as they are, are according to the will of God. On the very contrary, what we say is that the world as it has come to be is such, and is pervaded and haunted by such powers and organisations of spirit, that when He in whom we see God came to our earth, it concentrated its instinctive forces and put the Holy One to death.

It is none of our business as Christians to explain how the world has come to be what it is. It is our business, of course, as reasonable beings ; but there we share the

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responsibility with all who claim to have reason,—to try to co-ordinate this multitudinous world into some kind of unity, to relate things to one another, and by the force of certain necessary laws of thought to impose upon the raw material of existence some conceivable idea or order. But this, I repeat, is a task which falls to us, not as Christians, but as reasonable beings, who can no more bear to live in a haphazard and untidy universe, from the intellectual point of view, than we should be able to live in an untidy and chaotic room which we never explored, never mastered and put to rights.

But if the retort is made that it falls particularly upon us who believe in the Goodness of God to account for, and thus to defend, those dark facts of life which occur to our minds the moment we reflect, there are two answers which suggest themselves to me at this moment in reply. For one thing, if we who believe must give some account of the evil in things, then those who do not believe will have to

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account for the equally obstinate and equally undeniable good in things. If men who believe in God stand confronted in all their speculations with the problem of Evil in the world, men who do not believe stand confronted in all their speculations with the problem of Good.

As the poet puts it, our faith is diversified by doubt ; but their doubt is diversified by faith. If we have not brought all things into subjection to our belief, they have not brought all things into subjection to their denial. If we who believe in God must account, for example, for the pain of the brute creation, they have to account for the beauty of flowers, for the glory and order of created things, for the presence in this vexed world of such a love for human beings and for truth as was able to endure the sweat of blood in Gethsemane and the nails and the thirst and the silence of God on Calvary.

And the other thing which we quite properly and quite firmly may say is that we who believe in God believe that God

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gave to man the power of choice and of moral freedom. It would be hazardous, and it is not necessary for our argument, to define the bounds of man's freedom. But freedom there is, and in a world where there is freedom there have always been self-seeking souls, and the tragedies for themselves and for others which self-seeking brings. And so, the world, society, as we see it to-day, is not the pure expression of God ; it is largely the consequence of man, his self-love, his self-interests encountering indeed the unquenched protest and appeal of God.

I must not allow myself, however, to dwell longer upon such matters, though I do hold there is room for some clear thinking upon them in order to divest ourselves as believers of a responsibility for the intellectual solution of life which was never properly our concern. We shall see what precisely is our concern by keeping closely to St. Paul's thought in this passage, where, in the fullness of a great wave of fervour and confidence, he

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reveals for our advantage the things which lay at the basis of his own life.

We pass our days, he seems to say, in a world of hostile pressure, tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, death, life, angels, principalities, things present, things to come, powers, height, depth. What then? What are we to make of these things which are the facts of life, as we in our timid speech to-day are too fond of calling them? For, just as, when we do not like a person, we sometimes indulge our private anger under the guise of being zealous for truth, telling him the unpleasant things we can remember, calling these "the facts," so, when we do not like God, our minds acquire a morbid power of accumulating disheartening things which we also call the facts. Well, St. Paul names very generously those disheartening things which those who are so minded might quote to impugn the holy or even the wise government of this world. But he does not call them facts. Here the Apostle anticip-

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pates much that modern philosophy has given us. He virtually says, There are no facts. There is only one fact, the fact of God in Christ. All the other so-called facts are mere circumstances of that one supreme fact, and take their place for or against that one supreme fact. Tribulation, distress, anguish, persecution, death, life, things present, things to come—they are all here. Yes, but we also are here, and Christ, the power and comfort of God, is with us.

I know, of course, that there is such a thing as objective reality ; but for the purposes of living it is wise to believe that things in this world are according to the depth and purity and passion of our souls. The spies who went to search out the Land of Promise encountered the same facts : but they were not the same facts for Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, as they were for the others. Seeing what they saw, the others decided that it was a bad business. Seeing the same things, Joshua and Caleb

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decided that it was well worth while. "We saw the sons of Anak," said the others, "giants of great stature. And we were as grasshoppers in our own eyes, and so were we in their eyes." We impute ourselves, said Tennyson. A man who feels like a grasshopper is sure that he looks like a grasshopper. But that was not how the same set of facts impressed Joshua and Caleb. They said, "If the Lord delight in us, we be well able to overcome them." And there you have what made the difference ; and it is what makes the difference up and down and through and through. There are no facts. There are only impressions of facts, reactions upon facts, and the nature of the impression or of the reaction depends upon the force and confidence of your soul, and that ultimately depends upon your sense of what lies at the back of things, your sense of God.

Now that is precisely what St. Paul says here, and saying what he says in the height and fullness of his spirit (which is

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the only condition in which we can speak about life, for in such a mood we are speaking out of the heart of life itself), he has anticipated all Christian philosophy and idealism, and has erected for the long-enduring religious soul an impregnable retreat and place of recovery. Shall these things separate us from the love of Christ ? And as he uses the words, they form not a question, but an answer. It all depends, he would say, upon where you begin. I begin with God, with God as He has come to me in Christ. That for me is the one indisputable experience. Every other thing in life, and all life, must in my universe stand up to that one fact. You have not merely to account for those dark things such as tribulation, anguish, death, and the rest,—you have now to account for me, for this fitness which I feel, with which I glow, to pass through the furnace of those formidable things. It is a phrase of the more warm-hearted biologists of to-day that life is a thing by itself and not to be accounted

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for in terms of chemistry or mechanics ; that this life-urge, this *élan vital*, is the ultimate thing which uses and refuses, according to its own primordial genius and intention, the world through which it flows.

In the world of morals, face to face with those sinister aspects of life which would seem to mean that we are all of us the victims of fate, of heredity and environment—in such a world, the one sure datum—and it remains inexplicable until we take our courage in both hands and believe in God, whereupon it becomes the clue to the mystery of existence,—the one sure datum is that a man acts from his own centre.

So, in the world of spiritual realities, the one indisputable fact is that God in Christ can so deal with the soul that confides itself to Him, that there and then, and so long as the Faith and Communion are maintained, there is given to that soul a personal resiliency, a power of happy reaction against disheartening

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things, a prospect of eventual triumph which for the religious mind is the One Fact of Life, colouring, qualifying, annulling, reorganising all other facts, for it implies God and commits God to us in love.

“ What is this psalm from pitiable places  
Glad where the messengers of peace have trod ?  
Whose are these beautiful and holy faces  
Lit with their loving and aflame with God ?

“ Eager and faint, empassionate and lonely,  
These in their hour shall prophesy again :  
This is His will who hath endured, and only  
Sendeth the promise where He sends the pain.

“ Ay unto these distributeth the Giver  
Sorrow and sanctity, and loves them well,  
Grants them a power and passion to deliver  
Hearts from the prison-house and souls from hell.

“ Thinking hereof I wot not if the portal  
Opeth already to my Lord above :  
Lo there is no more mortal and immortal,  
Nought is on earth or in the heavens but love.

“ Surely He cometh, and a thousand voices  
Call to the saints and to the deaf are dumb ;  
Surely He cometh, and the earth rejoices,  
Glad in His coming who hath sworn, I come.

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“ This hath He done and shall we not adore Him ?  
This shall He do and can we still despair ?  
Come, let us quickly fling ourselves before Him,  
Cast at His feet the burthen of our care.

“ Flash from our eyes the glow of our thanksgiving,  
Glad and regretful, confident and calm,  
Then thro’ all life and what is after living  
Thrill to the tireless music of a psalm.

“ Yea, thro’ life, death, thro’ sorrow and thro’ sinning  
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed :  
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning ;  
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.”

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## **Chapter IV**

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“Shall tribulation . . . ? Nay, neither death, nor life . . .”

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## Chapter IV

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In our last study what I wished to bring out was that Christ offers and secures to the soul which confides itself to Him—a blessedness, a condition of peace, of well-being, of confidence, which it is not in the power of any event or set of events to corrupt or to terminate. And I went on to say that that is still what we claim as the proper influence of Christ in our souls. Christianity, I was meaning to say all the time, is not a philosophy of life, though it is our point of view for the interpretation of life : it is not a defence of things as they are, though we do say that if things are bad, hard to endure even with the help of a faith in God, they are simply appalling and overwhelming without such a faith.

No : Christ came into the world not to clear away all mysteries. He came into

the world to enable us to become good men, and it is as we become good men with His kind of goodness that life becomes intelligible.

And so here, St. Paul does not say that all things become easy to those who are in Christ ; that these cease to have any anguish of the body or any shadow upon their soul. He does not say that they cease to suffer, that they cease to have their perplexities, that life becomes a smooth thing for them and death spreads its dark wings and flies away. He says none of these things. Nay, he says the very opposite. Every single thing that makes life poignant to the human soul remains. Nay, to us Christians, in virtue of our new sensitiveness, those sinister things have a greater power to give pain ; and in addition, our new sensitiveness has introduced us to whole worlds of possible thrusts and wounds and shadows, of which unexercised souls have no experience. Life is more vivid, more acute, more directly assailing to us—what then ?

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What advantage have we over others ? We have this advantage—nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What, then, we see in this great passage, in the fervour and outpouring of which the Apostle is disclosing the very basis of his spirit, the final fears and final faith which wrestled within him in the depths of his being—what we see is, a man facing, in the power of his experience of Christ, the worst that life can bring, triumphing, in the power of his communion, over the evils of existence, and over such spectres of the mind as he has already known and as he can arouse by the force of his very imagination.

It is as though he were saying, for the fortifying of his own spirit, “Here stand I, in the blessed communion of Jesus Christ, my heart dwelling in light, in confidence, in the love of God. This truly, as the Master said, is life eternal, to know God and to know Jesus as God’s Son. And now, will it always be so with

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me ? But why should it not always be so with me ? What will ever be able to happen of such a kind that I shall lose under its pressure the Resource of Christ ? I know that anything may happen to me. I can foresee things that are very likely to happen. I can foresee the world's hostility closing in upon me : the tribulation, the distress, the persecution, the famine, the nakedness, the peril, the sword [at this point he recalled a verse from an old psalm as precisely fitting his own case : "For Thy sake we are killed all the day long : we are esteemed to be sheep appointed for the slaughter."] And in such trials, alas ! I may for a moment shrink in pain or in fear. But though my spirit, or rather my flesh, may wince and falter, He, my Saviour, will still be to me what He is. He cannot deny Himself. And surely He will come the more near to me in such a time of pressure, when, if He is to help me at all, He must come closer to me than the fears of my own weak heart. I thank God that in this

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matter I am not left to guess-work. I have already in the furnace tasted how gracious the Lord is ; so that I have not only passed through times of affliction, but I have more than conquered in them. For I have come out of them with a new experience of Christ, a new and blessed memory for my soul to carry forward wherewith to meet such trials as await me.”

At this point the Apostle in his solitary thinking one day paused. In a little while, we may believe, he resumed his journey, his spirit entering now a dark defile where there is no accustomed path, for a man goes this way once only. St. Paul looked into the face of Death. What has Death to say to Christ ? What has Christ to say to Death ? What will all this glow and tumult of my heart avail me when, one day, I am struggling for my breath ? Ah well, once more I do not know how I shall acquit myself in that lonely hour when, it may be, far from home, with no dear voice to hold

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my wandering mind to its own highest way, with no touch and movement of dear hands about me, I meet the last enemy. I may pass out of life as in a chariot of fire, erect, confident, anticipating, like Stephen, whom I saw die. Or I may struggle out of life in pain and in the disquietude of pain, perplexed, unsure, afraid. I do not know: I do not know how I shall behave myself at the very end. What then? “Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall death?” Nay, surely not! Surely if there is one moment in which more closely, with a greater passion of assistance, Christ will be with me, it will be in that instant when, having let go my hold on life as I know it, I am passing through the momentary void and amazement towards the life that is undisclosed.

I do not know how I shall behave: no, but then I have not for many years back been building myself up on how I might behave. The great thing God working through my moral life has taught me, is

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that my salvation ultimately does not depend upon my hold on God, but upon God's hold on me. And although I have lived in the light of that belief since that day outside the gate of Damascus, still it may take the whole experience of dying to discover to me how utterly I am nothing, and how utterly the love of God is all in all. I do not know how at the last moment I shall behave, but I know how Christ will behave towards me. I may never for one instant lose the way to His breast ; but even if it should be otherwise, if in the access of some mortal agony my mind should be darkened—that will be His own beautiful subterfuge to help me through, and all the time He will be holding me as a mother would hold her delirious child.

Here once again, on some unrecorded day of musing, of fear, and of victory over fear, the soul of the Apostle rested. When he resumed, it was for the last stage of the journey, when as a man, and as a thinking man of his own race and

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tradition, he confronted the world concerning which, except that it is in the hands of the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we know nothing of a surety, the land which lies on the other side of death. What awaits me there? And how shall what awaits me there affect this present warmth of my heart in Christ? “A man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?” What shall become of me, of this so feeble frame which holds all the treasure of my life, in that dim, high-vaulted, spirit-haunted place, where dwell the souls of men somehow? Here I have no experience at all on which to form even an imagination. The wise men of my own country declare that that other world is populated to the very full with spirits, organised into hierarchies, good and evil: angels, principalities, powers; that there, in that world beyond the range of our present faculties, the agents of all things blend and contend, and that the events that take place on the public stage of life are but the visible

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signs of the eternal conflict in the world of spirits.

And how shall the frail barque of my affrighted spirit sail upon the waters of such a raging sea ? Ah well, concerning all this I am in total ignorance. I do not know even a little ; and I praise God that this is my condition. For if I knew even a little I should be thinking too much about it, and how little it was compared with the necessities of the case. Whereas I know nothing about this place to which I am going. I see now that for the lovers of Christ, dying is the last act of faith. For what is faith but a reliance upon something which we do know, and upon that reliance setting out with a kind of innocence towards something which we do not know ?

Once again, I do not know in what way my soul shall acquit itself in that unexperienced climate ; but I know that if God be for us there also it will be well with me. To the question, therefore, which I asked myself—"A man giveth

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up the ghost, and where is he ?"—I make this simple answer. There in that untrodden world, a man is where he was ; he is where, with his deepest spirit, he always wished to be. If Christ is with him here, Christ will be with him there, but closer. He will call, and I will answer Him. He will have a desire to the work of His hands. Shall the world of crowding spirits, shall the cold immensity of space, the height and the depth—shall these separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord ? Nay :

“ Fear death ?—to feel the fog in my throat,  
The mist in my face,  
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote  
I am nearing the place,  
The power of the night, the press of the storm,  
The post of the foe :  
“ Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form.  
Yet the strong man must go,  
For the journey is done and the summit attained,  
And the barriers fall,  
“ Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,  
The reward of it all.  
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,  
The best and the last !  
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes and forbore,  
And bade me creep past.

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## If God be for Us

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No ! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers  
The heroes of old,  
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears  
Of pain, darkness, and cold.  
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,  
The black minute's at end,  
“ And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,  
Shall dwindle, shall blend,  
Shall change, shall become first a piece out of pain,  
Then a light, then thy breast,  
O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,  
And with God be the rest ! ”

A good way of testing the calibre of a philosophy is to ask what it makes of death. Philosophy, said Plato, is a meditation upon death, or rather it is the striving of the soul to escape from the conclusion to which death seems to point, to recover from the affront and insinuation which death seems to offer. Perhaps we might quite properly trace all the greatness of the human soul to its brave struggle through all ages with the thought and prospect of death. We ought to remember that great service which the fact of death has rendered man : that it has compelled him to struggle towards some point of view from which he could see

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through death and over it. What are all the outpourings of the spirit of man—in his art, his poetry, his worship—but so many ways of fortifying himself against the disheartening thought of death ?

We can conceive of a life without the shadow of death, but in our own best moments we perceive that it would have been a poorer life than the tragic, poignant life we know ; for in the long run it would have been a life without music, without hymns, without prayers, without tenderness, without mercy, without the qualifying presence of a great fear. Ultimately, it would have been a world without God. No : whatever hard things we may say about death, we owe to it, under God, our true possessions. Death is no mere thief in the night. In tender, right-living souls, he leaves more than he takes away. What an instrument for deepening the soul is death ! What a medicine for taking the fever from our life ! How much we should be to one another, who are one day to lose one another ! How expedient

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it is for us that they whom we love should go away ! For there are things about them and about ourselves and about God which we should never have known if our hearts had never been torn by a separation and enlarged.

Speaking for myself, I cannot follow those who make light of death, who regard all mourning and fear as unsuitable to Christians, and who even go so far as to praise death. I cannot follow them in such an attitude. To me death is the enemy, the last enemy. And I am sure that God means me to defend myself against it, and to shrink from it. It is in obedience to God's own ordinance that we should love and cling to life. The grave is still made formidable by fear and silence, lest any one should hurry out of this world before his work is done, before the season of his opportunity is closed.

“To be, or not to be,—that is the question :  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,

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And by opposing end them ? To die,—to sleep ;  
No more ; and by a sleep to say we end  
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to,—’tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wished. To die,—to sleep,—  
To sleep ! perchance to dream :—aye, there’s the rub  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause ; there’s the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life ;  
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
The oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,  
The pangs of despised love, the law’s delay,  
The insolence of office, and the spurns  
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,  
When he himself might his quietus make  
With a bare bodkin ? Who would fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscover’d country, from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of ?  
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all ;  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought ;  
And enterprises of great pith and moment,  
With this regard their currents turn awry,  
And lose the name of action.”—*Hamlet* iii. 1.

I trust indeed that when the hour of my necessity comes Christ will give me the victory over my instinctive fear, saving me from panic and cowardice. But I

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have no expectation that it will be for me anything short of a victory : that is, it will come to me only by way of a struggle, by way of faith. Any way of considering the end of our mortal life which is merely enthusiastic and contemptuous fails in the long run to solace the heart of man. We say : those who speak thus have simply not felt what we feel : they do not understand ; perhaps they are to be envied ; but again perhaps they are not to be envied.

The human soul has found its strength for the last encounter, not in the experience or testimony of those who have anticipated an easy crossing of the River ; but in the experience and testimony of those who anticipated that for them the River would be swollen and in flood. Now St. Paul affects me, recalling his writings at this moment, as one to whom the victory over death was no easy achievement. He affects me, therefore, as a normal man with the natural shrinkings and cravings of a man, one who had to

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wrestle with this enemy until the breaking of the day.

In some ways, victory over death was an easier thing for him than it may be for us ; although the circumstances which make the struggle a harder one for us are circumstances for which we ourselves are responsible, and for which, since we deplore them, we are to be blamed. For one thing, the unseen world was a manifest reality to him. The supernatural for him was not a difficult faith which he had to defend by argument. The supernatural to him was his habitual experience, to which he had been introduced by a fact in his own life. However near to his experience it may please God to bring us, it will probably always be something less vivid and objective than that appearance of the Risen Lord which struck Paul to the earth. It is true we have, or we ought to have, evidences of the supernatural which were not available for Paul ; —for example, from the subsequent history of Christ in the world. But encoun-

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tered as we are by other interpretations, probably no evidence of the Reality of the Unseen and of the actualness of Christ's supernatural power has been given to us, having the physical cogency of the facts which convinced him.

There are days when we wish it were otherwise, when we fain would have from God an open sign. But we confess that in such a petition we are asking for a lower gift; we are asking to see rather than to believe, thereby refusing for ourselves Christ's last beatitude. (St. John xx. 29.) And then it must have given the Apostle great confidence, face to face with death, to see how Christians could die. He had seen Stephen sink down in death, his face like the face of an angel. He had seen Christ not separated by death from those who loved Him. He could promise himself the succour of the Lord at the last, for he had never seen that succour fail.

And there I should like to interrupt myself for a moment. Nothing will ever

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sustain us in our preaching as will a sympathetic contact with our fellow-Christians in their bearing of sorrows and in their enduring of death. I am sure preaching suffers to-day from the absence of that conviction about the nearness and reality of Christ such as is fed by the actual sight of suffering and death borne beautifully in the grace of Him whom we preach. It may be that we are not invited or even permitted to minister to our people in their bodily distresses, as was wont to be the case. Perhaps our sick people, especially those who are seriously ill, are being wrongfully deprived of the society and the spoken intercessions of those who share with them the Christian hope. Perhaps medical men have gone too far in the exclusively material treatment of human maladies—thereby provoking the equally false exaggeration, say, of Christian Science. Unless the restriction is released, it may even be our duty to draw the attention of our people to a practice which is

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based upon a most defective and irreligious interpretation of their nature and necessities.

But that is not my concern at this moment. My concern is for the loss to the public teachers of the Faith from that inexperience of Christ's supernatural power, which follows from having few if any opportunities of seeing, in those who lie on a sick-bed, the visible response of Christ to our intercessions. For myself, I do not know to what further thinness and emptiness and mere talkativeness and unreality my own testimony for Christ might have fallen, had I not during the first six years of my ministry gone in and out among the homes of unsophisticated people,—who would have protested against being allowed to suffer and to draw near to the end of life without the guidance and comfort of God's Word—and seen there on many a face which I can still recall the manifest Presence of Christ, giving victory and reconciliation and peace in circumstances which, apart

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from Him, made for sheer heart-breaking confusion.

I am sorry for any of my brethren who must go on talking and talking about Christ, who have never seen and who never see the Christ whom they are talking about in action.

My point was that Paul could ask, "Shall death separate us from Christ?" And could answer, No, indeed; for, to say no more, he had seen men fall asleep in Christ.

Shall death separate us from Christ? he asks: and swift upon that comes another challenge,—shall life?

If we were always true to what we know about ourselves in our own best hours, we should be more afraid of life than of death; in the sense, I mean, that we should be more on guard against the tendency of life to separate us from Christ and to interrupt the highest Communions of the Spirit. Whatever hard things we may say about death as it appears when

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it comes close to ourselves, one thing we cannot deny ; it brings us face to face with reality. Death delivers us from the confusion and incubus of a thousand petty cares. The very thought of death draws in the slackness of our souls, and puts us upon the strain, making us, it may be for the first time, capable of responding to the holier prospects and requirements. The shadow of death takes all commonness out of the soul. One perceives a kind of aristocracy in the bearing and in the tone of voice of one who has been deeply bereaved. And it is an old observation that a certain kingliness of aspect descends upon the faces of the dead : so that we who are still alive acknowledge that something has come to them which makes us inferior.

Far from death and the things which accompany death separating us from that world which lies beyond our sense-experience, nothing has such power to purify the soul and fill the empty space with God. **Jacob and Esau, two brothers, separated**

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for long years, the heart of the one bitter for revenge, the heart of the other trembling with fear—Jacob and Esau, coming together again in friendliness over their father's grave, helping each other to lay the old man's body in its last resting-place : that is a parable of the proper function of death in life.

“ O earth, so full of dreary noises !  
O men with wailing in your voices !  
O delvéd gold, the wailers heap !  
O strife, O curse, that o'er it fall !  
God strikes a silence through you all,  
And giveth His beloved sleep.”

We cannot say whether it was such an idea that flashed through the mind of St. Paul as he poured himself out in this passage, the idea that the thing which we are to be on guard against, as having the greater power to alienate our soul from its greatness, is not death, but life. We cannot say that that is what he intended : but on the other hand, we cannot say that he did not intend that. Great words, deep words, words that rise out of the depths of a whole life, always convey more

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than their first or precise meaning. They mean everything that they may mean to hearts which have come within sight of their depth.

Certain it is that it is not the deep things of human experience, but the shallow things which have the most disastrous influence upon the soul. All through his long career, man on the whole has borne honourably the inevitable facts, he has found within himself and in God resources with which to quieten himself in prospect of his own departure from this world. This may have happened to him because, confronted with something which, like death, is inevitable, he has ceased even to try to sustain himself, whereupon, leaning back in his weakness, he has come upon some hidden alleviation of nature or, as we should state the matter in our warmer and more logical speech, he has come upon the Everlasting Arms of God.

Certainly it is a fact worth pondering that we all of us do better face to face

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with the big things than with the little things. We are greater when we bend under a burden than when we are still quarrelling with some mere care. Thus it often happens that we are most thoroughly made free from cares, not by a wind from God cleansing our sky, but by a wind from God filling our sky with overhanging, thunderous, electric clouds, beneath which the cares that a moment before had seemed so important hide themselves in a kind of shame. A drowning man is not aware that he is getting wet; for when a man is getting wet, it is his comfort that is being invaded, whereas in drowning a man is fighting for his life. We might go so far as to say that the only remedy for the smaller evils of existence is to feel, in fact or in imagination, the threat of some deeper and more ultimate evil.

There is more danger of atheism in the management of the little things of life than in the management of the deep things. In the management of the smaller

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things, we imagine that we are sufficient for ourselves ; and therefore, we become harassed, moody, liable to a thousand fears ; whereas, in presence of the great things, the inevitable things, the ultimate human things of life and death, we know and we acknowledge that we are not sufficient, that unless God be with us, there is no hope ; and in such a moment, before we know where we are, the soul within us, which is always ready to go further than the strict evidence, has already reached the heart of the whole matter, declaring to itself that if God be with us, all is well.

But the question, “ Shall life separate us from the love of Christ ? ” must have had for Christians of the first century a quite definite meaning and one quite free from subtlety or over-refinement. Let me try to say what I think the meaning would be for those who first heard these glowing words. One day, as we are going about at our work, or travelling, or looking out of our window in an idle moment,

our eye may fall upon some one doing something which is evidently his daily occupation ; and we suddenly ask ourselves how is it possible for any one, who must do such a thing day in and day out, year in and year out, to keep his soul alive. For it sometimes comes home to us, with a force which brings us to a standstill, on what innumerable lives of obscure monotony—to say no more—the fabric of our own personal comfort is sustained ! And no good man will permit himself to escape from that moral uneasiness until he has convinced himself, first, that he honours those nameless victims of civilisation, and, second, that he also is doing something with the spirit of the Cross in it.

I say, a day comes when our eye falls upon some person, meanly engaged, occupied in some task for the sake of his or her livelihood, so exacting, or so petty and so monotonous, that we wonder how any flower of the spirit, of the imagination and affections, can bud or blossom on such

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a soil and in such sunlessness. Some time ago I was passing through a huge factory, and there, amidst heat and the clanging of machinery, I saw a man punching holes with a hammer. Stroke upon stroke, stroke upon stroke, his arm rose and fell. I watched him for some time, but there was no variation, no need, it would appear, for any further mental resource on his part. That is his work by the hour and the day and the year—until, I suppose, his hand becomes faulty, and he has to stand aside. I know it is a very mild illustration of the kind of life that countless thousands must meanwhile lead.

Here and always, we must of course remember that the heart knoweth its own joy, as well as its own sore ; and one who merely looks on is disqualified from pronouncing on the things that may be happening beneath the surface in any other life. We must take care lest our pity for our fellow-men become really disrespect and contempt for the soul

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within them. It may very well be that the life which we lead in the world is quite as hardening, quite as ruinous to the imagination and spirit, quite as pitiable from the standpoint of the soul, as that other's work which we shrink from because it is mean and haunted by poverty. Indeed, we must take care, in our expressions of idle pity, that we do not simply betray our own essential worldliness, speaking as though happiness and the life of the soul were altogether dependent upon material conditions, denying to a human being the power to transform and triumph over conditions by the force and joy of his spirit. When you or I feel a wave of shame and pity for the hard lot of any of our fellows, let us see that it is first of all an active passion and no mere reaction of personal distaste and self-satisfaction ; and second, that it is free from the taint of contempt for the soul in others and for its amazing and inexhaustible resources. For it may very well be that there is a point of view, and

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this nearer to the mind of God, from which things are seen in a totally different perspective, and apprized on a totally different scheme of values, where those whom we count first are last and those whom we count last are first.

It is not to be wondered at, however, that in an age like our own, so rich in material things, the sense of the resource and cunning which dwell within human souls for finding always a basis of joy, should have almost died within us, so that our philanthropy, and sometimes our very religious interest in the poor and outcast, is vitiated by a veiled contempt and disregard of the soul within them : as though life, with its merely external conditions, could after all separate men from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are all too ready to-day to forget the power of love, of affection, of imagination, of moral ambition, of faith, of prayer, to pierce the gloom and monotony of circumstance and to recover for life that soul on which, through all the

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ages, man has mounted up on wings, or has run without weariness, or, in the steepest places, has walked without fainting by the way.

Still, when all is said, there are certain conditions which more than others dispose such as are under them to think in a mean way about themselves and to lose heart. There are always those—and in a complicated and heedless civilisation they must be a great host—who, unless they have an exquisite faith, might well suppose that life, the kind of life they must daily lead, had cut them off or was slowly shutting them out from any freedom of the spirit, from any personal initiative or high communion. And indeed, apart from our faith that we have a private life within the love of God, apart from our faith that God cares for us one by one, with all that that implies and shall lead to, what are we better any of us than so many conscript soldiers, so many victims and prisoners of life ! But this was a thought which might with much

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reason come over the minds of the first Christians. They were for the most part slaves. All the old civilisations rested upon a basis of slavery.

Now the thing that makes slavery intolerable to Christian minds is not simply the physical hardship that accompanies it. What makes slavery,—and if the same can be said of any existing social arrangement, then it also is contrary to the mind of Christ, and must go,—what makes slavery obnoxious to Christian minds is that it disposes its victims to accept as the truth *their own sense of worthlessness*.

But what had those first Christians wherewith to overcome within themselves this sense of worthlessness ? They had the wonderful knowledge that Jesus Christ had thought them worthy. He had given Himself for them. We cannot to-day even imagine the thrill of self-respect, of self-recovery, which would run through their veins like fire to read or to hear such words as “ Who being in the form

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of God . . . humbled Himself and took upon Himself *the form of a slave.*"

Shall life separate us from the love of Christ ? Shall it put us away from Christ that we are poor ? For our sakes, He became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich ! Nay, then, far from life, our life—so poor, so friendless, so difficult, so obscure—far from our life separating us from the love of God, what if the truth rather be that it is just such a life as ours, and only such a life in spirit, that can maintain within souls the tenderness and humility and passion of necessity which unite us to our Blessed Lord in faith and hope and love !

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## **Chapter V**

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“Nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present,  
nor things to come, nor powers.”

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## Chapter V

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IN dealing with words like these, words which are unusual, words which embody ideas that are strange to us, it will help us towards the true understanding of them to remember, once again, that it was always a serious thing to live. It will help us also to remember that anything which was ever passionately believed contains an abiding truth ; it was an attempt, affected, of course, by the limits of human knowledge at the time, to account for matters which are probably quite as mysterious to ourselves, matters for which our explanation may appear equally strange and unenlightened to those who come after us. Anything that was ever heartily and persistently believed represents, we may be sure, a way of looking at some mystery of life or of thought which at one time helped people to bring

some kind of order into the world, so that they might feel more or less at home in it.

We are “dwellers in tents,” not merely from the point of view of our physical life passing through youth and manhood and decay to what lies beyond all experience ; we are dwellers in tents in matters of the soul, in matters of knowledge, of thought, and in the region of ideas. But this is not to say that because one set of ideas comes to be forsaken for another, which in turn becomes obsolete, therefore all are equally false. For a serious and sympathetic student of history, it should rather mean that through all time man has found himself confronted with a world which he has insisted upon understanding, a world which he has girded up the loins of his mind to meet and master by virtue of his own quality.

At each stage the interpretation arrived at may have been defective, or in the light of later knowledge false, though false is too strong a word for any theory of things which in its day represented

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the highest and most serious effort of the human mind. At each stage, I say, the interpretation which served for the time being may have been inadequate, or, to the wiser minds which were being formed, even foolish, but though the interpretation may have been wrong, the instinct to seek an interpretation was right, and its persistence is one of the precious evidences of man's distinction.

And again, though this interpretation and that may have been wrong, inadequate, quaint, foolish, this is not to say that there was not all the time something that required an interpretation. It may be that this gnostic account of the cosmical process, for example, which ascribes to hierarchies of spirits the creation and control of things, can no longer satisfy our reason or our moral sense. But when we have discarded the gnostic account, we have not thereby taken any positive step towards the solution of the mysteries which that account attempted to relieve. We may, of course, content ourselves

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with an agnostic attitude, and say that the entire matter is beyond us, that we are quite incompetent for absolute truth, that we had better mind our own business, that nobody knows anything, or can ever know anything ;—and so on.

But such an attitude, we must confess, is less worthy than theirs who at least did believe that the human mind was not incapable of finding truth, who, without saying it in so many words, did by their thinking claim that man stands in an organic relation to all things and to the absolute God and to all intervening and mediating spirits and principles. That, I say, is a nobler attitude than to give up all thinking ; for to give up thinking in any ultimate way about this life of ours, and to devote ourselves to our own petty and ever-contracting circle of interests, resembles rather the alleged delusion of the ostrich when it buries its head in the sand and supposes it is safe.

Throughout the New Testament one encounters in every page references to

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what would appear to have been a more or less accepted body of ideas, imaginations, beliefs with regard to the presence in this world and over it of demonic or angelic, immaterial forces and powers. These references when they do occur affect us as arising out of a traditional basis and doctrine of existence, such as the writer or speaker could assume as present.

At the stage of spiritual development which has been reached at the close of the Canon, there is no distinct repudiation by the Church of the general outlines of that cosmogony. In this, as always, the Bible is not a book of philosophy. It is willing to begin with men as they are, content that they embrace the living truth concerning God as that is revealed from age to age, leaving it to themselves, to their sense of honour towards God, to amend, adjust, or abandon such thought-systems and life-systems as they have been living by, according as these systems betray under the new light any embarrass-

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ment or hostility. Just as the one interest of nature is life, and for the sake of life she will allow types and species to perish, so the one interest of God in history is the advance and refinement and freedom of the spirit, and for the sake of that God will permit the overthrow of every institution of man, as a thinking being, in doctrines, and as a social being, in laws, when those doctrines or laws have become intolerable to the demand and requirement of life.

The function of the Spirit of God in Holy Writ is to keep pouring in the new wine ; it is no part of His function to manufacture the wine-skins. It is left to us, using our good sense, our sober judgment, exercising also from time to time a certain fearlessness, and that willingness to take a risk which is such a true part of our nature, it is left to us, when an old wine-skin can no longer contain the precious wine—when, it may be, the old wine-skin is beginning to taint and disqualify the wine—to prepare new skins,

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new habitations of the spirit, new thought-systems and life-systems, lest the wine of God be lost to us and we are left with only the old skin, with but the memory of the days when it was full.

Throughout the New Testament, I say, we see cropping out, like rock above the soil, a whole system of beliefs with regard to the immaterial nature of things. I think it is fair to say that nowhere in the New Testament is there any thorough-going repudiation of the habitual beliefs of the people. Again and again, very deliberately in the Colossian Epistle, believers are put upon their guard against the dangers of these demonic or angelic or spiritualistic theories, and are charged to abandon without the slightest hesitation any habit of thought or of imagination which appears to be in conflict with the moral majesty of God, and with the Immediate and Sovereign rights of Christ. But here, as always, the line which Christ takes is first of all to knock at the door of a man's heart. If the door is heartily

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opened and Christ is made welcome, He will come in and sup with the man. He will come in, that is to say, and make Himself at home with the man, sharing his daily, habitual life with him. But Christ on the whole leaves it to the man into whose life He has come, himself to say what things are worthy to remain in his life in view of the fact that this Holy One is now a sharer of all his intimacies. On the whole, Christ leaves it to the man into whose life He has come, to say what kind of thoughts are going to stay on with him as guests.

We have all of us some kind of philosophy of life, some kind of way of looking at things, and Christ does not begin by either approving it or disapproving it. He begins by coming into our life: and He leaves it to ourselves to act loyally upon any sense of uneasiness or incongruity which, under the new light and with our new point of view, we may discover between Him and the things we used to think, or used to believe, or used to prac-

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tise. If our old ways can accommodate themselves to His wonderful way, well and good. But if our old ways begin to jar upon some fine sense of life which Christ has given to us, if things we used to do without thinking we find ourselves now compelled to think about and to think about very sadly, why then it is part of "the manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us to call us sons of God," that Christ trusts us to act honourably by our private sense of the fitness and unfitness of those interior arrangements.

Here I cannot do better than recall an old story from the Bible ; a story which I believe was preserved not simply as a piece of history, but as a parable of the method by which God always works and makes His way. The Philistines, you will remember, once upon a time took captive the Ark of the Lord, and placed it in the house of Dagon, their own god, and, it would appear, even alongside Dagon ; not knowing what they did.

There they stood, those two,—symbols of the only two ultimate Spirits, the only two Gods who finally and in principle divide the allegiance of man. There they stood, to begin with, side by side. But it was only for a moment that they even appeared to be at peace with one another. Night fell, night and darkness, which puts the test to gods and men. Night fell, and in the darkness, in a region beyond the eyes of men, the terrible struggle began. In the morning Dagon lay with his face to the ground, and the Ark stood alone upon its place. The Philistines, supposing it had been an accident,—though Dagon, so far as we know, had never staggered until that day,—set him back in his place again. And the night fell: and through the darkness once again those two struggled for supremacy. Next morning, Dagon was down again, and this time he had fallen with such violence that his head and the palms of both his hands were broken, and nothing was left to him but his stump.

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Now all that, I say, is not merely history, it is fact, it is truth. And it describes the way of the living God always. For us in these last days the interpretation is, that Christ comes into our life. In His great love He does not ask before He enters whether we are worthy to receive Him. He comes in. He sets Himself right down in the midst of all our habitual ways, leaving it, I repeat, to ourselves not to put out our hand to save anything which at the rebuke of Christ is beginning to totter from its place in our heart. If things as they were with us before He came can endure His Presence happily, let them stay. But if, without speaking, the Face of Christ sets up within ourselves a distaste for them, if before Him they feel uneasy and ashamed, let us rise and once again open the door, and let those conflicting things go out of our life, as indeed, at that moment, they wish to go out.

Now, if you have grasped the spirit of my words so far, and of this old illustra-

tion, I can pass on to deal briefly, and yet quite fulfilling my intention, with the body of ideas and fancies and beliefs underlying these words : “angels, principalities, things present, things to come, powers.” In these words it is evident that St. Paul is marshalling before his own imagination certain aspects and shapes which, apart from his faith in the love of God in Christ, would dishearten or appal his spirit. What were those formidable aspects or shapes ?

It would take me far beyond the limits of my purpose to deal even inadequately with that view of God and the world which probably lay at the back of the minds of those to whom the Gospel first was preached. I should, to begin with, be under obligation to describe the rise of the spirit of speculation amongst the Jews, dating historically from the time of the Exile. I do not mean to say that men, still less men with such a faculty for religion as the Jews, never concerned

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themselves with abstract questions concerning God and the soul until they were taken captive. But what I do say is that the captivity—in the judgment of the later writers and editors of Holy Scripture—(witness the message of the Book of Jonah and the burden of many of the Psalms), had the effect of deepening human life, of raising questions which pierced deeper and deeper until they touched the very frontier where the human mind must pause. This is an effect which, in the light of our own experience, we are prepared for. It is life and death, it is experience, it is defeat, it is overthrow, it is disappointment, which lays open the depths within us, and discovers the depths around us.

When all prospect of Israel or Judah ever becoming a nation again was removed, the soul of the people, represented by its prophets and saints, began to turn in upon itself. Here as always there was first that which was natural and afterward that which was spiritual. When

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the dream of being a great nation, the peer of Egypt or Assyria, had been shattered, there and then the soul of this God-disciplined people fell back upon more essential things. Good men perceived God's will and stated it in the exclamation "that Zion is her bulwark and her God her glory."

But before this solution and interpretation of her long experience had been perceived and accepted,—and we can trace the whole story in the Old Testament, in some of the more rebellious Psalms, in the Books of Chronicles, in Ezekiel, and in Haggai; the beautiful, pathetic story of the soul of a people being braced by God to forego a worldly ambition and to accept a career of the Spirit; the soul of a people, we might say, contending like our Saviour in the wilderness, tempted of the devil, and later, dropping sweat and blood in a Gethsemane, learning to say, "Thy will be done";—before accepting such an interpretation and solution of her long experience, there

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was many a bitter cry when good men wrestled with the contradictions of life, with the baffling triumph of the great, godless powers of the world, and with the apparent silence of God. But at last the great light broke upon the holiest souls,—that God's purpose for His people was not and had never been that they should be great, having chariots and horsemen like the uncircumcised nations of the world, but that they should be holy unto the Lord.

Now, in all this process and passage from merely natural ambitions to the acceptance of a mission of suffering and testimony to God, the soul in man had been profoundly intensified. Baffled of its outlet towards the world, the soul turned in upon itself and discovered an inlet towards God. Faith built for itself an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. There is no more wonderful proof of God's peculiar intercourse with the soul of the Jewish people than to observe how they faced the disaster of

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all their worldly ambitions and became deep enough to be satisfied with an overthrow at the hands of life which flung them on the breast of God.

When a puissant nation is denied its freedom, when it sees no happy issue and occupation for its natural force, you will inevitably have psychology, mere thinking in a circle and pessimism. For pessimism is simply insight without faith. It is tenderness without faith, tenderness refining upon itself, and failing to complete itself and recover from itself in some hearty activity.

It was in that period, doubtless, when the nation, having abandoned its merely worldly ambitions, was falling through space towards God—it was then, we may believe, that interest in the unseen, in what might lie beyond experience, in theories of existence, in apocalyptic, became a necessity.

It may be said that the Jews picked up their apocalyptic in Babylon, and that in order to understand what they believed,

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we must study Babylonian sources, and beyond them the beliefs and superstitions of still remoter ages. I do not think so. Here again I agree with Mr. Chesterton, that to understand religion to-day there is no need to acquaint oneself with the habits of the undisturbed South Sea Islanders. The way to understand religion is to go to church. Nay, I should say the way to understand religion is to have had any one of those shattering human experiences, the loss of a wife or of a child, or the prospect of a surgical operation, you still being a young man with the world before you, or to have found yourself out in some moral shame. These are among the things which quicken the soul to search for God.

Let it suffice to say that in Apostolic times there was abroad in the world a spiritualistic philosophy which had arisen doubtless in the first instance in all finer souls as a refuge from the sense of futility and despair, a philosophy which, to begin with, was a faith and even something of

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a gospel, and which, like every other faith, was compelled to develop itself to meet the difficulties from the side of the human reason, and to accommodate itself to established pieties and prejudices. The consequence was that an elaborate gnosis or interpretation of all things in terms of spirit, of demonic or angelic influence, was current in the world, and was indeed, in one aspect of it or another, the first enemy of the Christian faith.

I might proceed to indicate some of the outstanding principles of this spiritualistic philosophy. But I shall content myself with a word or two. Its first and pervasive principle was that matter is evil. The question thereupon arose, How did this world come into existence ? It must have proceeded from God. But how could what is evil proceed from Him who is pure spirit and goodness ? To overcome this dilemma, it was alleged that in the immense gap between pure Spirit or God and matter or creation, there is an immeasurable host of spirits organised and

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graded, becoming lower and lower in quality as you proceed from God to the earth, but the difference of spiritual grade between one rank and another is extremely fine. According to this scheme, it was not God who created the world but an inferior Power, the Demiurge, who of course must have been in some relation to God, but between God and the Demiurge it was felt not to be so impious to suggest a relation as it would have been to bring God into direct contact with the finished product of creation. The Demiurge in turn established and sustained his agency over things by means of hierarchies or levels of spirits, angels, principalities, powers, thrones, and so on.

It was a naïve attempt to solve, by a system which one might picture to one's own mind, a problem for which perhaps there is no solution of the kind. At the outset most probably these intervening spirits were not supposed to be evil. They were, from the moral point of view, indifferent and plastic: and in the New

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Testament the line which is taken is not that they are necessarily evil. The line in the New Testament is, as we shall go on presently to say, that whatever they are, Christ has triumphed over them and can endue the soul with a power which sets us free from their influence.

It was inevitable, however, that as soon as men began to be troubled by the obvious evils of the world, these should be traced to the operation of some of those intervening ranks of spirits—to the imperfection of their particular work in the organised scheme of existence, or to their abuse of the freedom which had been measured out to them by their superiors.

Now here again I would ask you to remember that it was always a serious thing to live. However defective and impossible of belief such a doctrine may be to ourselves, let us not forget that it was at any rate a protest against the despair of the human reason face to face with a universe whose final processes are still inscrutable. The questions in which

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this gnosticism interested itself are questions which lie at the root of our religious consciousness, and will under new terms and dialects continually recur. "The impulse was given to its speculations by an overwhelming sense of the unapproachable majesty of God, by an instinctive recognition of the chasm which separated God from man, from the world, from matter. Its energy was sustained by the intense yearning after some mediation which might bridge over this chasm, might establish intercommunion between the finite and the Infinite."

Confronted with this philosophy, encountering it in the general atmosphere, aware of its principles in his own mind, how does the Apostle deal with it in this spontaneous outpouring ? For in these glowing words, I repeat, we are not dealing with the momentary excitement and sudden enthusiasm of a man, but, as I believe, with deep, reasoned principles of thought and of belief which in many a lonely, unrecorded struggle, perhaps in

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those three silent years in Arabia, Saul of Tarsus had wrought into the marrow of his soul. There is heat in the passage certainly, but the heat only serves to melt the last restraint and reticence of his spirit, permitting us to see the inmost and final things which all the time were there.

St. Paul does not argue here for or against those theories. They may be partially true. They may be wholly false. He simply falls back upon what for him is the one truth and fact. God is for us, Christ being witness. God is according to Christ. Christ is the nature of God. Everything else must take its place or keep its place beneath or within that final and all-penetrating fact. For it is an all-penetrating fact. In our language, what St. Paul means at least is this (and may not this be the all-embracing truth of the Doctrine of the Deity of Christ to which the Church has clung, with sometimes even a blind tenacity, through history, even consenting to shed rivers of blood rather than add an

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iota to the “ homoousion ” ?) : that there is one order of mind throughout the universe, that the Power with whom we have to do is not merely like, but the same as, that which dwelt in Christ Jesus in bodily form.

In short, it might be maintained that the innermost contention within the belief in the Incarnation of God in Christ is that life is *sane*. If God is for us, and that is equal to saying, if God is in Christ, then neither angels nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers—nothing in that immense space which our minds conceive as lying between us and the final habitation of our souls, no intervening substance or spirit, can keep us apart from this Immediacy of Christ with us. Everywhere, anywhere, He shall be with us so long as our Spirit maintains its unity and identity.

And so it happens as a necessary consequence that Christianity soon or late makes for the overthrow of all superstition, of all spiritualism, of every tyranny

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over the mind of man in the name of the merely gigantic or occult or weird. For Christianity declares, and rests upon, and recovers itself in, the faith that the Content of the Eternal Mind is—goodness, the simple, real, intelligible, human goodness which we see in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a Face like His Face shall receive us, a Hand like His Hand shall throw open the gates of new life to us.

I read in the New Testament that Christ “spoiled the principalities and the powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His Cross.” I do not know all that these words and many others like them may mean. I can, however, feel what they must have meant to those who were asked at the beginning to believe them. And what these words and those many others which have the same burden would mean for them—and it is what they mean for me—is this : that surrounded as we are by the unknown, by a spiritual order, in which, it may be, the ancient evil of the world has its

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throne and complicated system of government and relations,—a spiritual headquarters to which the evil influences of lives return and from which, it may be, they descend to the earth again to vex and seduce the ever-new race of men ; surrounded by such a world of possibilities (to say no more), we believe in the reign of that God who dwelt in all fullness in Christ Jesus ; we believe that He is there as He is here, that no spot exists in the Universe of Spirit which is given over to Chaos or to undisturbed and unthreatened devilry.

“I am persuaded that neither . . . angels nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” It is as though St. Paul were saying : You and I know nothing for certain about the immaterial world which one day shall receive us. I may have my own beliefs, and those beliefs of mine I may clothe with such imagery and circumstance as

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help me to realise them. But in all these things it may be that I err. The Lord has not spoken plainly concerning such things : it may be that by His silence He would discourage all mere curiosity concerning the unseen world. One thing I know ; God is supreme, and for me God is Christ.

Luther's hymn, indeed, is a fair translation and comment on the passage which has been engaging us.

“ A safe stronghold our God is still,  
A trusty shield and weapon ;  
He'll help us clear from all the ill  
That hath us now o'ertaken.  
The ancient prince of hell  
Hath risen with purpose fell ;  
Strong mail of craft and power  
He weareth in this hour ;  
On earth is not his fellow.

“ With force of arms we nothing can,  
Full soon were we down-ridden ;  
But for us fights the proper Man  
Whom God Himself hath bidden.  
Ask ye who is this same ?  
Christ Jesus is His name,  
Of Sabaoth the Lord,  
Sole God to be adored,  
'Tis He must win the battle.

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“ And were this world all devils o'er,  
And watching to devour us,  
We lay it not to heart so sore ;  
Not they can overpower us.  
And let the prince of ill  
Look grim as e'er he will,  
He harms us not a whit ;  
For why ? his doom is writ ;  
A word shall quickly slay him.

“ God's word, for all their craft and force,  
One moment will not linger,  
But, spite of hell, shall have its course ;  
'Tis written by His finger.  
And though they take our life,  
Goods, honour, children, wife,  
Yet is their profit small ;  
These things shall vanish all,  
The city of God remaineth.”



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## **Chapter VI**

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“ Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation.”

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## Chapter VI

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IN the work of the poet whom best I know, to whom, under God, I owe more than to any other for insight, for respect and sympathy for the human soul, for a point of view from which to interpret experience in terms of God, there are four lines which never fail to raise in my own mind the very spectre which confronted the soul of St. Paul when he asked himself this question : “ Shall the height or the depth, shall the utter vastness of things separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord ? ”

In the Epilogue to “ Ferishtah’s Fancies,” Browning has left us some twenty lines which will always have for some souls the power of a “ Marseillaise.”

“ Thronging through the cloud-rift, whose are they, the faces

Faint revealed yet sure divined, the famous ones  
of old ?

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‘ What,’ they smile, ‘ our names, our deeds so soon  
erases

Time upon his tablet where Life’s glory lies en-  
rolled ?

“ “ Was it for mere fool’s-play, make-believe and mum-  
ming,

So we battled it like men, not boylike sulked or  
whined ?

Each of us heard clang God’s “ Come ! ” and each  
was coming,

Soldiers all, to forward face, not sneaks to lag be-  
hind !

“ “ How of the field’s fortune ? That concerned our  
Leader !

Led, we struck our stroke nor cared for doings left  
and right ;

Each as on his sole head, failer or succeeder,

Lay the blame or lit the praise : no care for cowards :  
fight ! ’

“ Then the cloud-rift broadens, spanning earth that’s  
under,

Wide our world displays its worth, man’s strife and  
strife’s success,

All the good and beauty, wonder crowning wonder,

Till my heart and soul applaud perfection, nothing  
less.”

And now listen to the four lines in  
which, as it seems to me, a man might  
express the last, the final despair. They  
are a paraphrase, I believe, and exposi-

tion of that mood of blankness and emptiness, when the horrible insinuation of our ultimate futility, the laughter and contempt of death, offers itself to us,—a mood which even the Great Apostle had known, nay—why should not we say it and claim it with great wonder and gratitude? — a mood which our Lord Jesus knew for one awful moment on the Cross, a mood which He triumphed over on that battlefield which lies somewhere between the “ Elohi, Elohi, lama sabachthani ” and the “ Father, into Thy hands ”; the last awful fear that things may mean nothing at the end and therefore may have intended nothing all the time. Listen to the poet :

“ Only, at heart’s utmost joy and triumph, terror  
Sudden turns the blood to ice : a chill wind dis-  
encharms  
All the late enchantment ! What if all be error—  
If the halo irised round my head were, Love, think  
arms ? ”

“ What if all be error ? ” A man who can say those words in pain is standing or has stood upon the last promontory,

overlooking vast, sad waters. Even a great man had better stand there once only, and then, but for an instant. Ordinary men had better never go so far. Fortunately, ordinary men have not the faculty for such loneliness, for such separation of their soul from their body. This is the experience, I venture to think, which the Hebrew belief had in view, which declared that to see God is to die. The sense of the Absolute brings Death. We sometimes in our folly ask for an open vision, for a direct immediate contact with reality. We know not what we ask. Thanks be to God who hideth Himself, who discloseth Himself to us, here a little and there a little, and all within the aspect of His Grace in Christ—lest the truth should at any moment be too much for us.

I have written elsewhere of this sense of vastness and its natural effects upon faith ; how, unless we take care, there may come a kind of giddiness over us, occupying such a precarious place between such a depth and such a height. It is

this sense of vastness which makes for the pathos of Tennyson, and for the dignity and pride and aggrievedness of Arnold, and for the cynicism and pitifulness of Hardy, and for the frivolity and sensuality of smaller irresponsible writers. These are the various consequences which are inevitable, and they threaten us all peculiarly in these days when we have become aware, as no age ever could be aware, of the intolerable duration of time, and the aching immensity of space.

I cannot but believe that it was essentially this very challenge which St. Paul is facing here : “ Shall the height or the depth separate us from the love of God ? ” Of course the ideas which those words called up for him would be other than they suggest to us. But beneath the surface here also is a man facing the universe, overcoming the terror and discouragement of it by the power of his faith in Christ.

When all is said, there is no other way. “ We have but faith, we cannot know.”

“This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith.” “By faith we know that the world was made by God.” “Faith is the giving substance to things hoped for, a conviction concerning things not seen.” “Let not your heart be troubled,” so our Lord besought us, “believe.”

Faith is a venture upon God which we make on the invitation of Jesus ; and the peace of God, the total sense of well-being, which comes to us in consequence, we hold to be sufficient verification. From this point of view, the thing that makes a man a Christian is that he has staked, not this or that, but himself (the very phrase used by St. Paul of Epaphroditus)—he has staked himself upon Christ. A man is a Christian—from the point of view of this region of things with which we are dealing now,—who can say : I am in for Christ. I believe in Christ. I believe in Christ’s belief. I see the things which seem hostile, but Christ saw them with a clearer eye than mine. He saw the stars,

but they did not make Him shudder with fear. They did not move Him to any mere pity for man,—having such thoughts of Himself and so soon to be engulfed in the ocean of eternity. Beneath the stars, in desert places, He knelt, yielding Himself up to God, thinking Himself into God. He met, He encountered, He transformed the Ancient Silence by His moral Passion and Insight. He thereby saved my intellectual soul, as in His Patience of Love on Calvary He saved my moral soul. And what makes me a Christian is that I believe all that of Him and love Him for all that.

The question whether ultimately I am right or wrong is not, properly speaking, open to me. What makes me a Christian, once again, is that here also, in the words of a hymn of my childhood, “I want to be like Jesus.” Jesus called the Power behind all things — Father. The stars moved across the heavens for Him, the night-wind sighed : He was at home with God. The clouds massed over His head

from the sixth hour to the ninth hour. He tasted the bitterness of life, He tasted the bitterness of death. For one instant His Soul seemed to hover in the balance. "My God, my God," He cried, "where art Thou?" But next moment the deep, deep peace was come again. And Jesus whispered, "Father, into Thy hands."

And once again, what makes me Christian is the faith which is at the same time a necessity for my very sanity as a man—that Christ's experience of God is the final truth of things.

Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded—(I am persuaded, I am in the condition now of one who has been persuaded, not overborne by an argument, but moved, melted, won by the gentle, loving pressure of another upon

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me)—I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

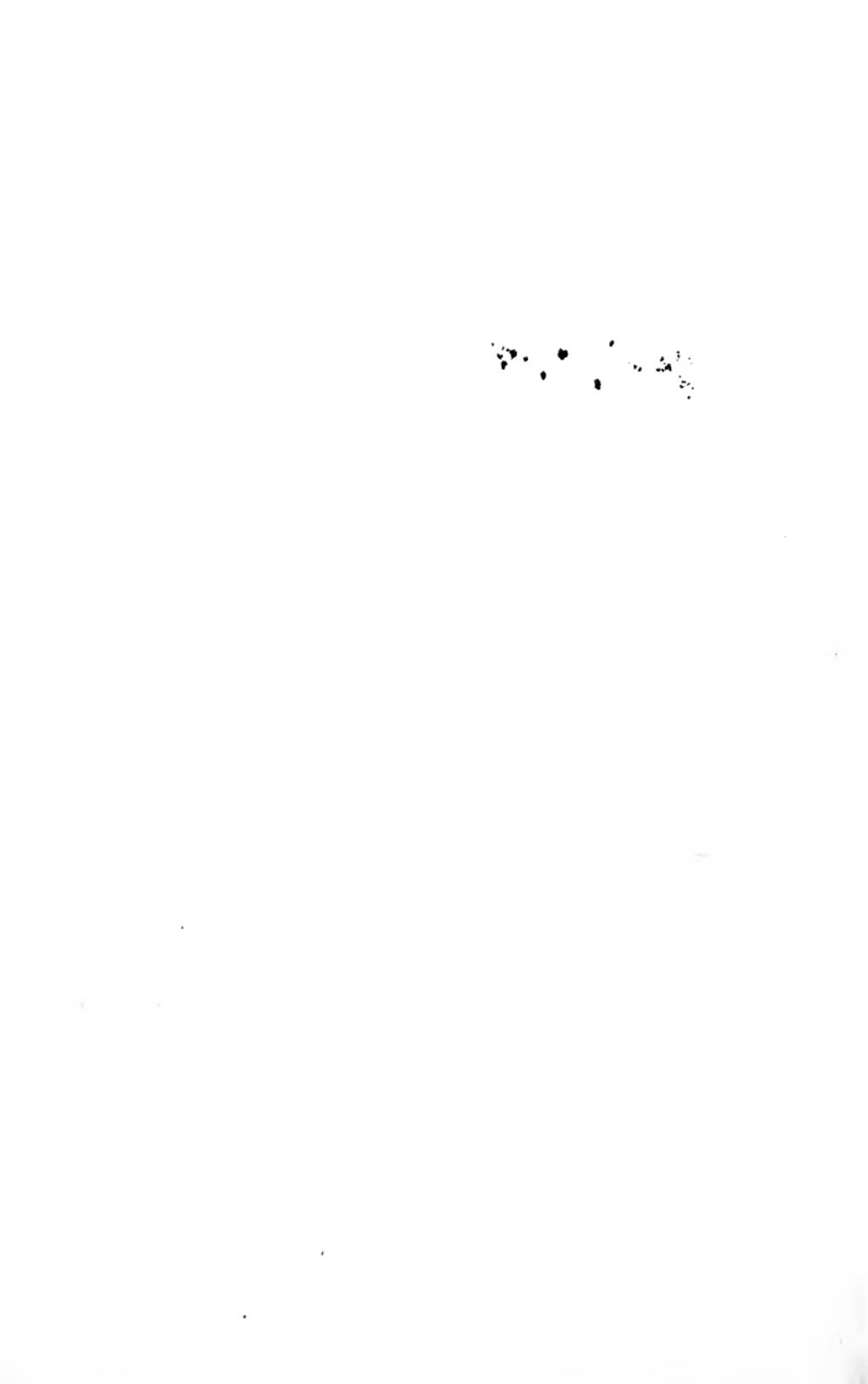




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